

CHINA'S POPULATION POLICY

AS a postscript to Dr. Han Suyin's article on page 81 we believe readers would be interested to see a selection of the informed comment which has appeared in the Press of this country since China's new population policy was announced.

On March 11th, 1957, *The Times* printed the following leading article:

Good Earth is Not Enough

There are 630 million people alive in China at this moment. How can they stay alive? The mystique of Marxism can do nothing to flip this awkward question aside, for it is the very root and foundation of China's future. We can see this from two exhibitions that have lately been held in Peking. The first was devoted to agriculture; an exhibition devised by scientists to show what science can add to the experience of four thousand years of farming. The second, no less scientific, explained the importance of birth control. Such exhibitions are the starting guns of campaigns that push their influence to the most distant villages of China. So 900 model agricultural workers were summoned at the same time for a conference at which they were told, without much ideological wrapping, what China faced. Agriculture was China's basic industry and the main source of Chinese capital accumulation; only with an agricultural surplus for export could China import the capital goods she needs. China must grow more.

It was the second exhibition which pointed the urgency. The 582 million found to be dwelling on the mainland in the census of June, 1953, have been increasing—by 13 million a year according to *People's Daily*, by fifteen million a year according to Mrs. Li, the Health Minister, whose right hand, with better hygiene and medical services, has been increasing the number, but whose left hand, with a campaign for birth control, is now officially instructed to reduce it.

The sanguine hopes of Communist planning have not been shattered, though the brave words of five years ago, that Communism could cope with any population, are now being quietly digested. In fairness it should be said that in the eight years of Communist rule the weather has more often been harsh than kind. Both in 1954 and in 1956 the tragedy of floods and drought ended the hopes of millions of farmers. But even against these ill winds China has kept abreast of its rising population. What is now clear, as the first Five-year Plan comes to an end, is that the increase from the land is not enough to provide the surplus planned for; as the years pass it may

be even less so—and even the opening of new lands in the north-east and north-west will not work wonders. Exports of pork and edible oils have already had to be drastically cut for this year. To the cry of all hands to the plough has been added the plea for fewer mouths to feed.

The following annotation appeared in the *Economist* on March 22nd:

Family Planning for China

Until fairly recently the family was the main exception to the Communist predilection for planning. The Chinese did not differ in this respect from the Russians. When the startling results of the previous year's census were published in 1954 (claiming a total population of 601.9 million, of whom 582.6 million lived on the mainland; 7.6 million in Formosa; and 11.7 million abroad) the Chinese dismissed as "Malthusian nonsense" any outside suggestions that such a pressure of population might be an obstacle on the road to prosperity; they even argued that fertility must be encouraged. Now, however, the line has changed completely. At the last meeting of the People's Consultative Conference Mrs. Li Teh-chuan, the Minister of Health, made an impassioned plea for birth control. If the campaign begun a year ago for disseminating contraceptive measures was not rapidly expanded, she argued, many women would resort to abortion and sterilization, which are now freely permitted.

Probably the *volte-face* was inevitable, granted the stupendous fertility rate in China, where the "passion of the sexes" is as formidable in its statistical effects as when Malthus used the phrase. A sample survey in a Shanghai factory showed that 17 per cent of the women were pregnant twice within a year, and 53 per cent once a year. "In one Shanghai mill of 7,000 male and female workers, the women workers of the factory produced 7,000 children in seven years." As the improvement in the health services has reduced "natural checks," it is claimed that China's population is increasing at the rate of about 15 million, or 2.5 per cent, a year.

The Chinese Communists have not abandoned Marx for Malthus. But they have had to realize what a barrier this pressure of population places in the path of the rapid economic development which they seek. Hence Mrs. Li Teh-chuan is now permitted to proclaim, in flat contradiction of earlier Chinese declarations of faith, that without the planning of childbirth China cannot "free itself from poverty, become prosperous, rich and strong."

An editorial in the *New Statesman* of March 16th is reprinted below:

PEKING

Contraception and the Party

A Student of the Chinese Press writes: China has now followed India in accepting that, without planned childbirth, freedom from poverty is impossible. The population, Health Minister Lee Teh-chuan told a conference last week, is now growing at the rate of 15 millions annually. Contraception, the women were told plainly at a recent conference, is a "positive method of birth control." The masses must understand that "artificial abortion is a negative method of birth control." Since the popularization of modern methods of delivery, "about two million more infants and 200,000 more confined mothers survive annually than in pre-liberation days." It is quite natural that this problem has a special meaning in the textile industry with its vast number of women employees. The *Hsin Hunan Pao* described a publicity campaign launched by the Hsiangtan textile mill, where "women workers have felt the increasing pinch of too many children both in health and pecuniary consideration. They want no more babies." "Incomplete statistics," the paper adds, "show that 70 per cent of the women workers and clerks have used contraceptive contrivances or eaten Chinese herbs that have contraceptive efficiency. On blackboards, posters and radio programmes publicity has been made on contraception. The contraceptive guidance groups have also undertaken registration of workers who desire to have no more babies and make monthly routine calls to get timely advice on contraception." When Mr. Shao Li-tsu told a Peking conference of the single comprehensive method of swallowing tadpoles to prevent conception, many provincial papers reprinted his speech, and created a great deal of interest in the method. The *Chien Kang Pao*, mouthpiece of the Ministry of Health, at first supported Mr. Shao's thesis, but more recently, local medical authorities have received many requests from women's conferences for a proper study of the subject. Reporting one such conference in January, 1957, the *Changsha Hsin Hunan Pao* described a great variety of work; "symposia for residential committees of children and women's homes"; "an exhibition propagating the knowledge of contraception," attended by 7,000 people with the accompanying distribution of 300 copies of contraception brochures; "a pictorial exhibition which toured in the suburbs and villages." This publicity is not lost on the men. "A man named Wu Jen-tsao at Yueyanshsien, having seen the exhibition, said 'My wife had too many births. So she used musk and quinine to get abortion. The result was she was laid up for several months and nearly died. I certainly appreciate the Party and

Government's concern for the people'." The *Peking Daily Worker* reflects the difficulties of women textile workers, in a resolution passed by the National Committee of the China Textile Trade Union, "condemning the practice of requiring women workers suffering from miscarriage to produce, within 24 hours, physical proof of their right to leave . . . such practice, still followed by certain textile mills is contrary to the laws of the state and insulting to the character of the workers. This practice of discrediting the masses and insulting the integrity of women workers has touched off popular discontent."

On April 30th Roderick MacFarquhar wrote in the *Daily Telegraph*:

Thirty Are Born Every Minute

"Five children disrupt studies" was the simple caption to a cartoon which appeared in the Peking People's Daily. It contains many lessons for the 630 million Chinese who are now being fed birth control propaganda through pamphlets, lectures, films and exhibitions.

By having too many children, official argument runs, the young couple are prevented from studying and working hard for the nation. A well-drilled Chinese would add that they are lowering their standard of living and straining the slender educational resources of the State by providing it with extra pupils.

Two methods are being used by the Communists to reduce their population's rate of growth—later marriages and birth control. The Marriage Law lays down the minimum ages for marriage as 18 for a girl and 20 for a man; now there is talk of raising them, perhaps to 24 and 28, to help to reduce the birth rate.

Birth control was at first scorned by the Communists who saw in their vast population a symbol of the nation's power. But in August, 1953, the State Council (Cabinet) instructed the Ministry of Health to help the masses to exercise birth control.

The importance of this step was underlined in 1954 when census results showed the population to be 582 million—more than half as much again as the 1951 total of 356 million in India, where birth control is also being promoted. Furthermore the Chinese rate of increase is at least 2.2 per cent each year, compared with India's 1.3 per cent, which means that there are almost 15 million more Chinese to feed every year. Thirty Chinese are born every minute.

Though there is more virgin land in China than in India, a speaker at a recent conference in Peking said it was wrong to suppose that China's growing population could be provided for merely by enlarging the cultivated acreage.

At the same conference, Mme. Li Teh-chuan, the Minister of Health, said that the problem was

of such dimensions that the Government was relaxing the regulations against abortion and sterilization. She no longer denies, as she did to me in London last summer, that China is overpopulated.

The Communists claim that birth control is desired by the people and especially by the women; but they also admit that the campaign is hindered by peasant suspicion and the traditional desire for sons to support parents and perpetuate the family. They have to reconcile the campaign with the Marxist attack on Malthusianism. Currently they argue that China's recent experience has given the lie to the idea

that the increase of population will overtake the increase in agricultural productivity.

The danger is that if the population increases too fast the economy will not be able to afford a living standard that will keep the masses satisfied as well as the rate of capital accumulation demanded by the régime's industrialization programme.

One non-Communist Chinese intellectual who accepts Malthusianism has estimated that if the standard of living is to rise the population must not exceed 700 million in 1970. At the current rate it will be almost 850 million by that time.

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